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SUBJECT: SRE'S GUTIERREZ TELLS SHANNON BORDER FENCE A  
BITTER PILL

¶1. (SBU) Summary: A subdued Geronimo Gutierrez used his October 2 meeting with A/S Shannon to voice Mexico's deep frustration with last week's Senate vote to fund a border fence, saying it was a "bitter pill" at a bad time that would complicate bilateral relations. Nevertheless, Gutierrez was hopeful that senior level contacts would continue and help move the relationship forward. SRE's Undersecretary for North America took the opportunity to thank A/S Shannon for the scheduled November 9 meeting between president-elect Calderon and President Bush, and briefly touched on pending IO issues, such as the upcoming vote for the GRULAC UNSC seat. End Summary

¶2. (SBU) Gutierrez began by thanking A/S Shannon for his early a.m. Televisa interview, which was focused in part on the Senate vote and Mexican reaction. He said that Shannon's comments, which placed the vote in the context of a national debate on immigration and emphasized president Bush's ongoing commitment to a broader immigration reform, might help defuse some of the anger felt in Mexico at the congressional decision to go forward with construction. Nevertheless, he said, last week's vote was a bitter pill for Mexican's to swallow that complicated the relationship. His biggest worry, he stated, was that during a critical period, the fence would box in transition leaders and make it more difficult for them to take decisions that would move Mexico closer to the United States on a range of issues. Foreign affairs decisions, he noted, always involved heavy expenditures of political capital in Mexico. Calderon would now be paying double. He hoped that A/S Shannon was correct in that the fence was not the last chapter in the immigration story.

¶3. (SBU) A/S Shannon assured Gutierrez that the administration remained committed to broader immigration reform. Given the debate in the U.S. about border security, many in Congress felt the need to act on getting a fence in place in the short-term. The president maintains a more far-sighted regard for the need for broader reform, however.

¶4. (SBU) By way of offering local context in which the Senate vote was taken, Gutierrez outlined the domestic challenges both the current administration and president-elect Calderon face. (Embassy comment: Gutierrez painted a far more pessimistic picture than Calderon's own advisors provided Shannon in a meeting just prior to his visit to SRE, noted in SEPTTEL End comment) He provide a brief, and by-now familiar sketch of Mexico's post-electoral scene and underscored the particular difficulties the current Oaxaca-related unrest present the Fox administration. He noted also that Calderon's transition team was taking great

pains to avoid moves that might radicalize government opponents, but that the president-elect will face difficult challenges early on in his administration.

¶15. (SBU) Elevating his gaze beyond the fence and the difficulties it poses for Mexico, Gutierrez looked toward the schedule of high-level meetings slated for this fall. He thanked A/S Shannon in particular for the November 9 meeting offered by the White House to president-elect Calderon. This was an important opportunity that both sides needed to take maximum advantage of; SRE will be coordinating closely with Calderon's transition team and the USG in order to shape it. Both sides agreed that such high-level encounters remain key to the relationship. Shannon noted the recent North American Forum in this regard and that said such encounters should be backed up by good public diplomacy. Gutierrez said they help educate elites and public about what closer bilateral engagement can offer -- and that it does not represent an erosion of Mexican sovereignty. Mexican elites are broadening their vision of foreign policy and national security engagement, but there needs to be more work done to shore up public support.

¶16. (SBU) A/S Shannon raised the upcoming UNSC vote with Gutierrez, noting that he had had a good meeting in New York with SRE's Undersecretary for Latin American, Jorge Chen. While Chen remains worried about Venezuela's prospects for gaining a seat on the security council, Shannon noted that the U.S. believed Chavez has not marshaled sufficient votes for a first round win, and that his inflammatory UN speech had probably cost him support. He urged Mexico to continue to work hard on Guatemala's behalf. Gutierrez reaffirmed Mexico's support for Guatemala's candidacy. Venezuela's presence on the Security Council, he said, would undermine

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both the U.N. and the GRULAC.

¶17. (SBU) At the meeting's close, SRE officials reminded A/S Shannon of the November election for the World Health Organization's Director Generalship and repeated Mexico's request for USG support for the candidacy of Public Health Secretary Julio Frenk.

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¶18. (SBU) Assistant Secretary Shannon has cleared this message.

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